The Other Europes

BY
STEPHEN G F HALL*

White, Stephen and Feklyunina, Valentina.
Identities and Foreign Policies in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus:
The Other Europes, Palgrave Macmillan:
London and New York, 2014. 350 pp.
ISBN: 9780333993613.

How should we define Europe? What constitutes Europe? What is the relationship between the European Union (EU) and outside states that deem themselves European? What are the discourses of these states towards Europe and their position within it? These questions form the basis of *Identities and Foreign Policies in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*. Whereas other studies perceived identity as a dichotomy, for instance between Westernisers and Slavophiles, this investigation changes identity perceptions, arguing that it should be considered a continuum.

The study, in conjunction with organisations in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine on the part of White and Fekyulnina involved extensive research over a 20 year period to ascertain meanings of Europe and the Belarusian, Russian Ukrainian regimes place in and perceptions of Europe. Professor Stephen White needs no introduction. He has been Professor at the University of Glasgow since the early 1970s. He is mostly known for work on Russia, but he has written extensively on Belarus and Ukraine. When this study began Dr. Valenitna Fekyulnina was a research assistant at University of Glasgow, but in 2012 she moved to Newcastle University to become a lecturer in politics.

As mentioned the study provides a number of questions. These can be summarised as what is Europe and where do Belarus, Russia and Ukraine fit in? The study is thematic; assessing what constitutes Europe and the European Union's failure in only seeing itself as Europe. From there the relationship between the EU and the Soviet Union is analysed. Afterwards the study looks at the competing discourse emanating from Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. These are categorised as 'Part of Europe'; 'Alternative Europe'; and 'Greater Europe'. The study then

* Stephen Hall is a PhD candidate at the UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies, London. His PhD is centred on the concept of authoritarian learning.

analyses opinion polls and through using focus groups it attempts to show how public opinion fits the discourses.

One is quickly drawn to the contention that the EU's relationship with Belarus, Russia and Ukraine is confused. This is not something new; many analysts have considered this relationship fraught. The EU has 28 Members making one doctrine 'something of a fantasy'. However, the authors go into great detail contending that the Maastricht and Lisbon treaties provided the EU with a 'legal personality'. White and Fekyulnina are particularly harsh on Poland and its relationship with Russia where Warsaw attempts to stop any thawing in the EU Russia relationship. However, other states like the Baltic States are also notorious at keeping the relationship cold.

The EU's failure to bridge the gap between common values and individual member interests has had a deleterious effect on its relationship with all three states. This is especially prevalent with Russia, as the Kremlin cannot work with an entity without a single voice. It has preferred to work with individual states. The relationship, as White and Fekyulnina argue was fraught as the EU never considered Russia an equal partner. This unequal treatment by the EU has also hampered EU, Belarusian, Ukrainian relations. The EU wants both states to integrate into the *acquis communautaire*, or 'co-operation on EU terms'. This has hampered any relationship. Yet, as the authors correctly state, it is difficult for EU, Belarusian, Ukrainian relations, as Belarus has integrated closer with Russia; while Kiev remains unstable making it hard to from a relationship.

As mentioned the study provided three potential identities on a continuum. In the early 1990s, Russia was considered unique, but a part of Europe wanting to become democratic. With ensuing disenchantment brought on by the EU's failure to see Russia as equal, the Kremlin, by 2004, perceived Russia as part of 'Greater Europe', quintessentially European, but with the stance that Russia is a great power unable to 'accept the superiority of Europe'. The combination of EU eastern expansion and its perceived role in the 'colour revolutions' has created a relationship of pragmatism. This is something the study draws out. It is commonly perceived now, largely due to Ukraine, in the west that the Kremlin is anti-western; however, since 2004 Russia has had a pragmatic relationship with the EU perceiving itself a part of Europe.

In Ukraine, the Ukraine as Europe discourse emanates from a pro-European conception of Ukraine. For pro-Europeans, Ukraine is European, suffering from Russian oppression. At the other end of the spectrum, Belarus, Russia and Ukraine have a common Slavic and Orthodox heritage. This is the discourse of 'Alternative Europe'. Proponents of 'Greater Europe' see Ukraine as neither part of Europe or Russia, but should take a middle way between both. 'Ukraine as Europe' and

'Ukraine as Greater Europe' discourses have been prominent as advocates of these approaches alternate in power creating a disordered relationship with the EU and Russia.

Belarus's identity is split. Opposition groups see Belarus as European with a history in the Polish-Lithuanian Grand Duchy. This 'Part of Europe' has become minimal as the opposition remain negligible. Rather White and Fekyulnina contend that the Belarus European discourse is split between the regime 'alternative Europe' rhetoric of close affiliation with Russia and a growing number of predominantly Russian speaking Belarusians seeing Belarus as a part of 'Greater Europe', European, but with an affinity to Russia. This remains the predominated dichotomy in Belarus. Yet, in the past the Belarusian regime has experimented with 'Belarus as Greater Europe', but once any relationship with the EU breaks down Minsk returns to an 'Alternative European' discourse.

In the penultimate chapter the study engages with public opinion ascertaining through polls, interviews and focus groups citizen opinions in the three states. The findings are that public opinion advocates that the special path is most popular although citizens of Belarus and Ukraine also advocate a multi-vector foreign policy. However this chapter seems to stand alone. Indeed the chapters seem abstract, the relationship between the Soviet Union and the EU while interesting historically offers little for understanding current EU, Belarusian, Russian, Ukrainian relations. Similarly, in the discourse chapters there is less about official discourse with too much analysis of competing identity discourses and less on what the regime says. After all understanding regime discourse and its progression helps understand identity and foreign policy issues.

This is the first of a few caveats. Throughout there remains continued reliance on identity or why these regimes choose a particular course. However there is only a limited acknowledgement that economic linkage and leverage and diffusion can have an effect. While the authors are largely correct that identity is the paramount factor, limiting the study to only this issue limits the overall investigation. There is another qualification. What became a study of identity and foreign policy in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine began as an enlarged study of Europe and what Europe means. Though Europe has grown, at least in terms of the EU, the investigation could have incorporated discourse of Balkan States to better understand 'Europe' discourses. Both authors are Russian scholars, so the Belarus and Ukraine chapters are minimal. Although this does not limit the study, it does not promote the entire discourse in these states, particularly with regard Belarus.

Unfortunately the most pressing problem is that the book was published in 2014. While the EuroMaidan is mentioned in passing it is not covered further. Of course this is not the authors fault and invariably EuroMaidan feelings will

dissipate into apathy, however, the Ukraine crisis has the potential to bring Ukraine fully into the European camp and a mention of this potential scenario would have been interesting. However this admonition is not the fault of White and Fekyulnina, after all it appears to be the continued fight between the perceptions of 'Ukraine as Europe' and 'Ukraine as Greater Europe'. However an analysis of what these events mean for Ukraine and Europe would have been both beneficial for the study and interesting.

Yet, these criticisms do not detract from what is an excellent and interesting study of identities and foreign policies. It is high time that analysis began to assess the continuum of identity rather than seeing it as polar opposites. This is what makes this study so important; identity is not something that can be categorised. People have always possessed multiple identities and so one should consider analysing it as a continuum. This study begins to assess identity using this criterion and thus it is an important beginning for future work. By ascertaining identities in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine, White and Fekyulnina provide apt and timely investigation that will change understanding towards a region where people and elites are European, but also different and where Belarusian and Ukrainian distinctness is evolving.